

Lutheran Woman

May 2010

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Cultivating Wisdom





A young girl visits a medical clinic at a Lutheran church in Jacmel, Haiti, February 9, 2010. People across Haiti continue to deal with the aftermath of the devastating January 12 earthquake.

The people of Haiti still need your help.

Soap. A toothbrush. Band-aids. A warm place to sleep. Tools to learn. Small things that, from your hearts and hands to hers, will make make a world of difference. Will you help? Assemble kits, sew quilts and share these gifts of Christ's love.



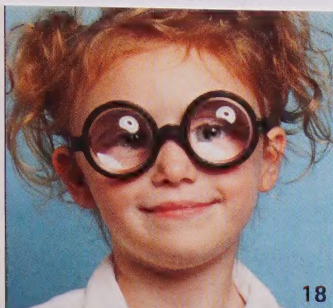
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WISDOM

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 4 MAY 2010

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VOICES

Wisdom

by Kate Sprutta Elliott

The connection between

our issue theme of "wisdom" and honoring mothers this month is fitting, I think. Some of the best and wisest things I have ever learned, I learned from women who are mothers—especially my own.

A quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln says: "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." While I appreciate the sentiment, for myself, I'd have to broaden that: "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to God, my mother and father, my brother and extended family, friends, teachers, colleagues, and even a couple of cats and a pony."

But my mom is in the top three, for sure. As I was trying to write this column, I got an email from her. It contained information about an upcoming birthday dinner and bus tickets and a report about a shopping trip, pretty mundane stuff. While she was writing it, a neighbor walked by her window, and she reported, "He's wearing tights!!!!" Yes, four exclamation marks. (If you knew him, you'd know that it merited four.) Whatever else I owe my mother, I surely get my sense of humor from her.

In "Words of Wisdom" Martha Sterne writes about mothers . . . "You either are one or you have had one. I asked a group of women what was the worst advice and the best advice their mother ever gave them. . . . My only regret is that I didn't think to ask them what is the best advice and worst advice that they gave to their own children."

In "Learning from Children," Herbert Anderson writes that if we pay

attention, children can teach us wisdom: "Wisdom includes having wonder and compassion towards all things. When people are wise, they have a way of seeing the mysteries and contradictions of life—yet still choosing to live faithfully to God's ways."

Susan Candea reflects on contradictions and mysteries and ministry as we mark the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women. She writes, "I believe the call of wisdom enables us to speak the truth, to speak honestly about our experiences, and in that truth to celebrate the incredible ways in which ministry happens, not in spite of the difficulties and challenges, but in the midst of them."

One way in which we grow in wisdom is through giving. Kathleen Haueisen Cashen asks, "Which is greater: the church's need for our gifts or our need to give the gifts?" She reminds us that "As we give, we grow. Giving to the church is what sowing is to gardening. It plants possibilities."

At the end of the month, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. In "The Wisdom of the Spirit," Phyllis Kersten asks us to think on this question, "How is the Holy Spirit active in our lives? And what might it look like if we did a better job of honoring the Spirit's wisdom, activity, and presence?"

May the Pentecost wind blow mightily in your life to spread the good news of God's love for us made manifest in Jesus Christ. 🌿

Kate Sprutta Elliott is editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*. You may email her at LWT@elca.org.



GIVE US THIS DAY

Old Marriage

by Mary Mortimore Dossin

When I was young, I wanted to be a missionary, certain I possessed a truth that was needed by people in far-off countries. Over the past half-century, however, I have come to believe that the place most in need of God's love is my own heart. I learned this not in exotic lands but in the intimate space of my long marriage.

I wrote a poem for my husband, Ernie, last summer:

I turned in my sleep. My fingertips brushed your arm. Warm and solid, you have slept beside me for 40 years. This is security, a body breathing next to mine for 15,000 nights. Oh, may it go on forever.

Every word of that is true, but it's not the whole truth. That same summer I found myself screaming at Ernie when he rose from the table one evening. I told him that he had never in 40 years put his chair back after getting up from a meal. We've laughed about it since; there are comforts in an old marriage. But I still wonder, where did that come from? Are we the only ones for whom rage sometimes seethes beneath a placid surface?

A charcoal drawing hanging in our dining room belonged to my husband's parents. An old couple sits in front of a cottage, framed by climbing roses. They appear smiling and content. Is that the whole story?

A friend of mine told me about buying their Christmas tree every year from the same tree farm and becoming friends with the owner. On their most recent visit he told them his wife is disabled and he does all the housework. It sounds noble

and self-sacrificing, but I wonder, is that the whole story? Maybe he's crabby and resentful. Maybe she is too.

There's what I call the "pastel pussycat" kind of love, those sweet drawings on cards and posters with sayings like "God's love is purr-r-r-fect." Love isn't sweet and easy, however. Our love for one another, like Christ's love for us, involves pain and suffering. We have experienced disappointment and sorrow. Our health is in decline, our mortality becoming more and more evident. Do we see in our aging spouse the increasing debility that might lie ahead for us? How natural it seems to lash out at the ones nearest to us as we face these hard truths.

Over many years, we have stockpiled an arsenal of resentments that can explode at a spark of conflict. At a women's spirituality workshop on forgiveness I attended several years ago I learned that we often bury those who have wronged us in a deep dungeon. Every once in a while, we go down to beat the prisoner again, a sure sign that real forgiveness hasn't happened. How different from God, who wipes our slate clean over and over again.

Mother Teresa once said the way a person can best serve God is to "Go home and love your family." Let it be so. But take along the Holy Spirit, who alone can do the work on our hearts that makes the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23a) ripen in our marriages. 🌿

Mary Mortimore Dossin lives with her husband, Ernie, on the shore of Lake Champlain in upstate New York.

"Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice... Hear for I will speak noble things and from my lips will come what is right."

Proverbs 8:1, 6

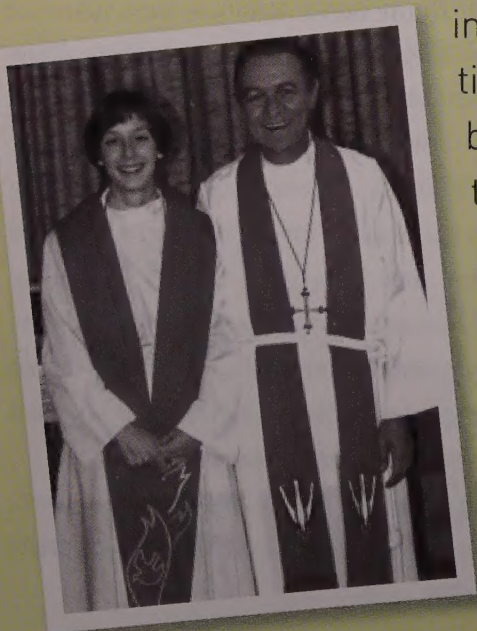
40th

ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ORDINATION
OF WOMEN

Wisdom Has Blessed Us

by Susan Candea

After more than 26 years of ordained ministry, I still question whether the call I received to this ministry was indeed right. This may seem a strange way to begin an article celebrating the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women. But I believe the call of wisdom enables us to speak the truth, to speak honestly about our experiences, and in that truth to celebrate the incredible ways in which ministry happens, not in spite of the difficulties and challenges, but in the midst of them. That is what I believe is worthy of celebration on this 40th anniversary.



Susan Candea, on the day of her ordination, with Pastor Leonard Rudolph (Sept. 28, 1983)

My call to ordained ministry began in my second year of college. After growing up in the church, being taught about the remarkable gift of grace in my confirmation classes, and having deep respect for my pastor, I still wondered why anyone would become a pastor. There were sermons to write every week, endless meetings and demands, and to top it off, never getting a weekend off!

But when my classes at a large university became less fulfilling and I felt more restless about my career choice, I decided to take a career assessment inventory at the university counseling center. It was to my great surprise that I scored very low on working in the law enforcement field (which was the profession I had chosen) and the very highest on being a priest. (There was no category for Protestant ministers.) Would wisdom call me from the crossroads of a secular educational assessment tool?

After my second year of college, I transferred to a smaller Lutheran college to finish my undergraduate degree before going on to seminary. It was on the first night at my new campus, coming back from a campus ministry event with another new student with whom I was sharing my new career choice, that I was told, "Women cannot be pastors." That comment stunned me.

Even though I personally had never seen a woman pastor, I knew that the church had in fact approved the ordination of women. It never occurred to me, growing up in a family of all girls where there was no distinction between what girls and boys could do, that my gender was an impediment to my becoming a pastor. Why would anyone, a fellow Christian no less, believe that?

But then I also began to notice and question other things, such as why God was only referred to using the male pronoun. Why did people say "brothers in Christ" when they meant the Christian community? I've never been a brother to anyone. I didn't know there was such a thing as inclusive language or that it mattered so much until I experienced the hurt of being excluded by it. Language shapes our view of the world, ourselves and God. It matters deeply.

First call

As painful as I experienced the comments and attitudes of those

who were opposed to women in the pulpit, what mattered more to me was the call—actually it felt more like a pull—to continue on the path to ordained ministry. With a newfound awareness of being female in a patriarchal church, I went off to seminary.

In a class of about 50 students, there were five women. Inclusive language was beginning to become a hot-button topic, but at seminary we could debate and argue and wrestle not only with the texts but with our theology and images of God. In that wrestling, I experienced tremendous growth and freedom. Upon graduation, I felt ready to receive my first call.

And I did: to a two-point rural congregation that had never had a woman on the council, let alone a woman pastor. Whose wise decision was it to call me here?

At the time, I was part of a clergy couple, and when I would take communion to the homebound members, I was told on more than one occasion how nice it was for me to visit, but then was asked when the "real" pastor was coming. One man in the congregation would count how many times I said, "God" instead of the male pronoun in my sermons and a small group of parishioners complained to the bishop that I was "destroying the faith of our children" by using inclusive language.

And yet, ministry happened. I preached the word each Sunday, which some of the older members could literally hear more clearly because my higher pitched voice penetrated their hearing aids better than my male counterpart. When a mother lost her second child within three years, I held her as she cried in tears wondering why God was punishing her. I pronounced absolution to a woman when she came confessing how she felt responsible for another family's tragedy. I was clearly a pastor to and with this community.

Second call

When I received my second call in Topeka, Kansas, I made the local newspaper because I was the first Lutheran female pastor in the area. A few members told me to my face that they had voted against my coming because I was a woman. Once in the elevator of the local hospital, when I was wearing my clerical collar, a stranger asked me if I could get married and have children. My shirt said I was a priest, but the skirt I wore made it confusing.

At a wedding rehearsal, a member of the wedding party privately asked me if the wedding would be legal if I officiated since they had never seen a woman preside at a wedding. About five years into my call, a small group of congregational members began meeting secretly

and took to the bishop a litany of complaints against me from my use of inclusive language and acceptance of gay and lesbian persons, to chanting off-key.

When there was a staff conflict, members of the council thought it was a personality conflict between two "strong women," rather than a personnel issue between a staff member and her supervisor. As I greeted people after worship on Sunday mornings, there were often comment on my looks, from a new hair cut, to wearing lipstick, to a new pair of shoes. "But did you pay attention to the sermon?" I always wanted to ask.

And yet, ministry happened. Even after a time of painful conflict, I stayed and continued to preach the word, teach the Scriptures, and baptize and commune members. I bragged that never once, when I took the child into the congregation to be welcomed after their baptism, did the child cry. After having three children, I had the whole walking and bouncing thing down pat!

Since I was at this congregation for so many years, many of the children grew up with me as their pastor. One young boy, when visiting his grandparents' church where there was a male pastor, asked his parents, "Can men be pastors?" At the end of my long pastorate at the

congregation, I am sure that if you asked the majority of members of the congregation what it was like to have a female pastor, they would give you a questioning look and ask, "You mean Pastor Susan?"

I was their pastor, clearly female, the mother of three sons, wore skirts and make-up, and used inclusive language. These things, rather than being impediments, were a part of what made me the kind of pastor that could stay in one congregation for so many years.

And ministry continues to happen

Now I am in my third call and I continue to face the issues and attitudes people have about women in ministry. Although at times, more subtle, it is nonetheless real. Asserting my role as a leader and supervisor is still met with the criticism that I am "trying to take over and control things."

For the first time in worship, when reading the Gospel for Pentecost last May, I used a feminine pronoun for the Spirit. A woman got up and walked out. It didn't matter that countless times I had read the Scripture not changing the male pronoun "he" in reference to God because I didn't want to offend or upset people. Why is inclusive language offensive?

Being a female pastor has not been an easy profession. I do take things personally, especially when people become upset and angry with me. This is my call, my passion and so much of my life. I care deeply about what I do and how I do it. I care deeply about the people for whom I am called to serve.

More times than I can count, I have told God that I simply cannot do this. You made a mistake when you called me. I do not have the strength or wisdom. I am worn out and worn down. There have even been a few times when I have been so hurt, so overwhelmed, so devastated by the negative and critical things said about me, that all I could do was curl up in a ball and sob.

And yet ministry continues to happen. With a strength and wisdom beyond my capability, I continue to preach the Word that both challenges and comforts. I continue to administer the sacraments, welcoming all to the table. I continue to care for the people in my congregation in the midst of the crisis and struggles of their lives.

Being female does make a difference in my ministry as a pastor. The word sounds different in my voice with my experiences. When I kneel down to give a young child communion, they see a different face, one like their mother's. When

reach out to a person who is dying, they feel a different, small, softer hand.

But that difference doesn't make me better or worse than my male counterparts. It reflects the profound reality that we are indeed one in Christ, all made in the image of

God. Perhaps wisdom did after all know what she was doing in calling me. While it hasn't been easy, I have been profoundly honored by all the ways in which people have allowed me into their lives as their pastor. I believe the church has been richer because of my ministry. *That* is why

we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the ordination of women—because wisdom has blessed us all. 🌿

The Rev. Susan Candea serves as pastor at King of Glory Lutheran Church in Loveland, Colo.



The Ordination of Women in the Lutheran Churches

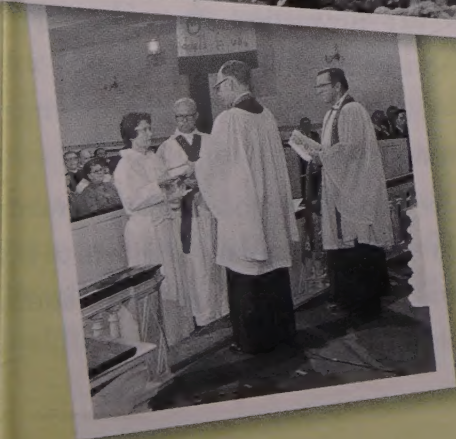
The history of ordination of women in the Lutheran Church in North America began on June 29, 1970, when the fifth biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America, amended its bylaws. Only four months later, the American Lutheran Church, on the morning of October 24, 1970, voted to adopt the recommendation of the Church Council "that women be eligible for call and ordination in The American Lutheran Church."

The Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches wrote its constitution in such a way that women were eligible from its inception. The constitution was adopted on December 3, 1976, at the church's founding convention.

- Elizabeth Alvina Platz was the first woman ordained as clergy in the Lutheran church in North America. She was ordained in November 1970 in the Lutheran Church in America (LCA). The American Lutheran Church (ALC) ordained Barbara Andrews in December of that same year. Approval of the ordination of women earlier that

year by both the ALC and LCA bodies was highly controversial.

- As of last year, there were about 19,000 leaders on the ELCA roster, of which more than 17,600 are ordained clergy.
- Of those ordained clergy, nearly 20 percent are women.
- Of the total ELCA roster (including associates in ministry, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, and clergy), 31.2 percent are women. In seminaries, the numbers of women and men preparing for ministry are nearly equal.
- Approximately 86 percent of ordained women and 83 percent of ordained men are actively serving in congregations.
- According to statistics compiled by the women's desk of the Lutheran World Federation, approximately two-thirds of the current 140 LWF member churches ordain women.



Photos from the ordination of Elizabeth Alvina Platz, 1970 (courtesy of ELCA Archives)



CALENDAR NOTES

May

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley from sources including the Lutheran Study Bible, Evangelical Lutheran Worship, and Sundays and Seasons, published by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers (www.augsburgfortress.org).

The joyful white season of Easter continues this month, concluding with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Then we celebrate the revelation of God's triune presence in the feast of the Holy Trinity.

1 Philip and James, Apostles

Philip was one of Jesus' first followers, and throughout the Gospels, we see him bringing people to meet Jesus. James son of Alphaeus is called "the Less" (shorter or younger) to distinguish him from the other Apostle James, who is commemorated in July. The church celebrates Philip and James on the same day because it was on this date in the year 561 that their remains were placed in the Church of the Apostles in Rome. The texts appointed for today are Isaiah 30:18-21; Psalm 44:1-3, 20-26; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6; and John 14:8-14.

2 Fifth Sunday of Easter

Scholars tell us that the book of Revelation was written to comfort and encourage a suffering, persecuted, divided community, and today's second reading from that book is certainly comforting and encouraging. Today's texts are Acts 11:1-18; Psalm 148; Revelation 21:1-6; and John 13:31-35.

2 Rachel's Day

This occasion was begun by a Women of the ELCA congregational unit in inner-city Chicago. The 1996 Triennial Convention approved a memorial urging all women to encourage their congregations

to observe the occasion every May. See www.womenoftheelca.org for resources, including many ideas for ways to stand up for and with children in danger.

4 Monica, Mother of Augustine

This bold woman prayed her brilliant but wayward son into faith; his theological writings are still studied today. She died on this date in the year 387. Read more about her in "Saintly Mothers," in the May 2008 issue of *LWT* (available online).

8 Julian of Norwich

This medieval Englishwoman compiled her visions into a book, *Revelations of Divine Love*. She died in about the year 1416. Read more about her in "All Will Be Well," in the May 2007 issue of *LWT* (available online).

9 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Today's second reading is a vision of heaven as a beautiful city with a river flowing through it. Why do you think God chose that particular image of heaven, and not fluffy clouds or lush mountain meadows? I like cities; heaven as a beautiful city works for me. What about you? Why or why not? The texts appointed for today are Acts 16:9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5; and John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9.

9 Mother's Day

Thanks be to God for mothers, grandmothers, mothers-in-law, mothers-to-be, spiritual mothers, godmothers, aunts, and big sisters, too!

113 Ascension of Our Lord

Today's passage from Acts gives us Jesus' last words to his followers just before his ascension into heaven: "You will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth." The ELCA's Global Mission unit acts on these words of Christ every day. You can support both their work and our own by giving through Women of the ELCA. Today's texts are Acts 1:1–11; Psalm 47 or Psalm 93; Ephesians 1:15–23; and Luke 24:44–53.

114 Matthias, Apostle

Chosen by lot after the Ascension, this apostle had traveled among the disciples since the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry. Some early traditions suggest that he went on to spread the gospel in the Caucasus region, but nothing is known for certain. The Scripture passages appointed for Matthias' day are Isaiah 66:1–2; Psalm 56; Acts 1:15–26; and Luke 6:12–16.

116 Seventh Sunday of Easter

Today's Gospel is taken from Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper. Here, he prays to his Father for them and for those who will come to faith in him through their work—that is, for us. Jesus prays for us. Humbling, isn't it? Today's texts are Acts 16:16–34; Psalm 97; Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21; and John 17:20–26.

21 Helena, mother of Constantine

This bold woman was brought to faith by her son, the emperor Constantine. She died about the year 330, after a long and colorful life. Read more about her in "Saintly Mothers," in the May 2008 issue of *LWT* (available online at www.lutheranwomantoday.org).

22 Vigil of Pentecost

Christians have observed a vigil on the night before Pentecost since at least the fifth century. Like the Easter Vigil, it was a preferred time for baptism; tonight's Gospel is a hint of that. The texts appointed for this vigil are Exodus 19:1–9 or Acts 2:1–11; Psalm 33:12–22 or Psalm 130; Romans 8:14–17, 22–27; and John 7:37–39.

23 Day of Pentecost

What were all those people doing in Jerusalem that day, according to the book of Acts? The ancient Jewish feast of Pentecost came seven weeks after Passover, and it was a joyful commemoration of the giving of the Law on Sinai 50 days after the Exodus. The Holy Spirit's descent upon the people in tongues of flame is a clear echo of God's descent on Mount Sinai in fire (see Exodus 19:16–25). What other parallels do you see between God's gracious gifts of the Spirit and the Law? The Scripture passages appointed for Pentecost are Acts 2:1–21 or Gen-

esis 11:1–9; Psalm 104:24–34, 35b; Romans 8:14–17 or Acts 2:1–21; and John 14:8–17 [25–27].

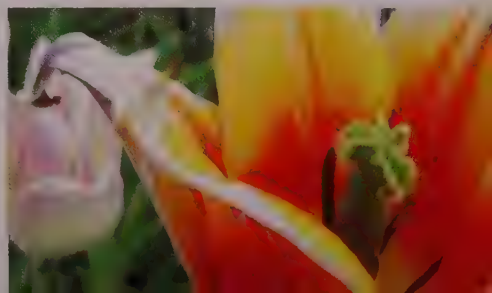
30 The Holy Trinity

First Sunday after Pentecost

Now that the Holy Spirit has descended, we rejoice in the revelation of our triune God. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia! Today's Scripture texts are Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31; Psalm 8; Romans 5:1–5; and John 16:12–15.

31 Visit of Mary to Elizabeth

Here we have a reminder of Advent right after Pentecost. The *Lutheran Study Bible* suggests that Mary "went in haste" to Elizabeth because her untimely pregnancy put her in danger of stoning. Why did she run to Elizabeth, of all people? About all that we know about her (besides that she's unexpectedly pregnant too) is that she's a distinguished older woman and "righteous before God." Do you know any women like that? I do. And I like to think that the Evangelist is showing us their distinctive brand of warm, welcoming kindness in his sketch of Elizabeth. The passages appointed for today are 1 Samuel 2:1–10; Psalm 113; Romans 12:9–16b; and Luke 1:39–57.





HEALTH WISE

Emergency in the ER

by Molly M. Ginty

What Christine Howard

wanted was faster care.

While languishing in a crowded Boston-area emergency room, Howard learned it would take her two hours to get treatment for her asthma attack. Battling for breath, she reached for her cell phone, called 911, and had an ambulance rush her to another facility.

"At that point, my face was gray," says Howard, a 45-year-old Braintree, Mass., woman who also had to wait at the second facility.

With the average ER wait time dragging on more than an hour, hospital overcrowding is a growing problem for the two in five Americans who visit ERs each year. "Emergency departments are where all the pressure and problems in our health care system collide," says Matthew Fenwick, a spokesman for the American Hospital Association. During May 16–22 or Emergency Medical Services Week, health advocates are raising awareness of the overcrowding problem—and shining a spotlight on possible solutions.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the number of ER visits has spiked 32 percent in the past decade. Older Americans, who are the fastest-growing part of the population and whose multiple conditions take longer than average to treat, are crowding ERs in record numbers. Squeezed alongside them are uninsured patients who have been left without jobs—and without employer-sponsored health coverage—by the recession. Federal law requires ERs to treat these

patients regardless of their ability to pay. So they're flocking to ERs in desperation when they have nowhere else to turn.

Alongside the problem of this increased demand comes the problem of decreased supply. According to the American Nurses Association, staff shortages have left more than 100,000 nursing positions vacant. And according to the Centers for Disease Control, closings and cutbacks have shrunk the total number of ERs by 14 percent over the past decade.

The Institute of Medicine reports that most ERs are now operating at or above capacity. This prevents patients from getting essential treatments in time. And that can be nothing short of lethal. A 2007 study at New York's Albert Einstein School of Medicine found longer hospital waits translate into more deaths. And in a University of Maryland poll, half of emergency medicine doctors said overcrowding is harming their patients.

The good news is that across the United States, health authorities, caregivers—and patients—are finding creative ways to beat the crowd.

In Ann Arbor, Mich., the University of Michigan Medical Center has split ER intake into two tracks: one for the sickest patients, who need long-term care, and one for patients with minor ills, who can be discharged quickly. In Washington, D.C., Washington Hospital Center is using the world's largest real-time clinical computer system to speed the work of doctors, who spend 60 percent of their time searching for information. At both hospitals, these

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

innovations have slashed ER wait times in half. From coast to coast, hospitals are using moveable walls and portable equipment to expand ER size and allow conference rooms and lobbies to serve as temporary wards.

“Hospitals can relieve overcrowding in low-cost and no-cost ways,” says Angela F. Gardner, MD, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians. “When an ER is full, for instance, we’re asking hospitals to put checked-in patients in empty units upstairs so they’re not waiting around preventing new patients from getting in the door.”

While authorities do their part, what can you to address ER overcrowding?

On the political front, you can lobby Congress to pass the Emergency Medical Services Act, which would boost federal funding to ERs and improve their services.

On the personal front, you can take steps to get the best care possible in the event of a medical emergency.

GET THE BEST CARE IN AN ER:

- “Keep a list of your medications and allergies—and your doctor’s contact information—in your wallet and with you at all times,” says Dr. Gardner. “If you do need to go to ER, having this will speed your care.”
- If you have your choice between several nearby ERs, pick the one with X-rays, CT scans, MRIs and other services directly on site; with supervising ER doctors who are board-certified; and with fully-trained doctors instead of residents—all features that speed care.



- Ask your primary-care doctor where he or she would go for ER treatment—and ask the ambulance to take you there. If your physician has admitting privileges at a hospital, you can bypass long lines and have your MD see you in an empty treatment room.

For more information:

American College of Emergency Physicians
www.emergencycareforyou.org

- “If you’re experiencing the symptoms of a heart attack or stroke, have an ambulance rush you to the best ER nearby,” says Kevin J. Soder, MD, coauthor of *Special Treatment: How to Get the Same High-Quality Health Care Your Doctor Gets*. “But if you have a twisted ankle or a sprained back, consider heading to an urgent care center, which treats non-life threatening conditions, takes only paying patients, and is usually not crowded.”
- Regardless of which medical facility you use, be clear, direct and honest with the triage nurse. “Never underplay your symptoms,” says Soder. “Otherwise, you could have to wait for hours, compromising your schedule—and your health.”

Molly Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Women’s eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms.*

by Martha Sterne

With Words of **Wisdom**

Mothering is multifaceted, but you knew that. You either are one or you have had one.

I asked a group of women what was the worst advice and the best advice their mother ever gave them. Think about that for a moment. What was the worst advice and the best advice your mother ever gave you? My only regret is that I didn't think to ask them what is the best advice and worst advice that they gave to their own children. So think about that, too.

Sometimes the quality of the advice is glaringly obvious. For instance, one woman told me that in elementary school when she was proudly showing her mother an all-A report card, the mother admonished her: "Don't be too smart. People won't like you." Can you believe that?

My mother, too, was very free with advice that was emphatic in nature. One rule for me for some reason was NEVER wear pink. It has taken me 60 years but I have found that I like pink, and I look real good in it. Mother also told me more than once to never learn how

to do anything I didn't want to keep doing. This has worked extremely well for me, but I would never tell my daughter the same thing.

Mother told me very emphatically to "STAY MARRIED!" She yelled this to my new husband and me as we were driving away with the U-Haul full of wedding presents to our new life. And truly, it has been great advice, and at times, very important to remember.

But another woman told me that her mother said to stay married, and she stayed far too long

"Happy Mother's Day.
If you are a mother,
thank God for you. Give
your kids lots of advice
and then tell them that
you might be wrong.
And that you are just
sure as can be that
they have what it takes
to figure that out."

with an abusive jerk partially on the strength of that command. A third woman said her mother said about marriage, "If you get it right the first time, you are darn lucky." Yes, but do you need to hear this from your mother?

This led someone else to say that her mother said "Don't go into any relationship thinking you are going to change the other person. The only person you can change is yourself." This holds true on most every level I can think of including Christian community. We ought to print it on the foreheads of brides and grooms, as well as the pastors who marry them. Have you ever seen a pastor come in and try to change a congregation without ever looking at herself and her own behavior? I have, up close and personal.

Some bad advice

Of course, when we got to the worst advice category, there were several alumni of the "clean plate" club whose mothers always told them to NEVER leave anything on their plate because there were starving children in Africa. Most of us are pretty chubby, and none of us have ever gone to Africa to eradicate poverty.

Some advice sounds horrible and isn't. A woman who is wealthy said her mother told her that money is power. I thought to myself,



hmmm, what kind of Christian value is that? On the face of it, teaching your child that money is power seems shallow and ruthless. However, the rest of the message, lived out in the lives of her parents, was that there are so many hurting people in the world who do not enjoy lives like her sheltered, comfortable life. And that with money, she had the power to change the world for the better, gift by gift. Whew! That is powerful. And I can tell you, she does change the world, gift by gift by gift.

My respondents divided along age lines for this next one. Those over 50 were told by their mothers that the teacher was always right. Those under 40 picked up somewhere—they couldn't really pin it on their mothers—that teachers were human beings, too, and that sometimes it was appropriate for a parent to advocate for a child. Since my daughter is a teacher and I am way over 50, in our family the teacher is double-always right.

Jesus' mom was human

In the tradition of the church, the mother of all mothers, the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a vision of faithfulness, purity, wisdom, and compassion. I have seen paintings and sculptures and fabric pieces inspired by her that have broken my heart open to the holy, and I imagine you have too. From age to age she

comes to people, as John Lennon sung, whispering words of wisdom . . . "Let it Be." Yet even the BVM didn't get it all right always and, occasionally, she gave Jesus some bad advice.

Scripture tells us Mary not only pondered the miracle of her child but also tried to get in the way of his growth, his call, his future. She worried about him going off the deep end. She went after him on the road to abandon his vision and come home. Instead, he refused to live his life within the framework of her comfort level. This is a huge thing. Jesus had to leave his mother and her anxiety for him behind, and then, of course, we know that when he would not return to being her little boy, she accepted his adulthood and she followed him all the way to the foot of the cross.

Mary is, in a word, enigmatic. She is every mother. Good advice and bad. Shadow and light. Here is a woman who incarnated Mary for me.

A woman like Mary

I only saw her once. She didn't seem to like her own personal children too much, but she touched me in a holy way.

I had been meaning to get by to see her for about six months. Since she was almost 100 years old, delay could be problematic. But I had done the little calculation I do

in my head about the boundaries of appropriate pastoral care, which in my case turns out to be so much more restrictive and self-protective than the Good Samaritan's portfolio. I bet the Good Samaritan never checked to see if somebody was in the parish directory.

So anyway. I went to see her because an 85-year-old mutual friend had asked me to—she said that she was an Episcopalian moved by her family into an elderly residential facility in our county. I took my time going to see her because she wasn't a parishioner and she was advertised as a "difficult person." Pastoral care calculus: supposedly Episcopalian . . . ornery. It took me six months to get there.

This Mary was in the bed by the window. Asleep, I think. On second glance, maybe asleep. Maybe playing possum.

She opened one eye. Saw: stranger, clerical collar, woman—potentially an off-putting combination. I smiled and asked her if she is so-and-so and told her that I am from the local parish and that I had heard she was Episcopalian. She barked back—"and Catholic and Presbyterian—nothing wrong with my religion! Not a thing."

Ooooookkkkaaayy. I stammered that "Oh I didn't think there was anything wrong with your religion." She glared. I wilted. I went into my one minute and outthere mode.

Then out of the blue, she said she worked for three federal judges, loved one of them like a son, raised him. I said, “really?”

And then she said, “It’s real different here. All these women. I have never worked around so many women.” I realized that she saw this nursing home gig as a job. And it is.

I tried to think of something to say back that was politically correct about being around all women but unfortunately, at that very moment, at work, we were in one of those tiresome, tiny church squabbles involving buckets of women of a certain age, including myself.

Her advice

At that point in the conversation I abandoned political correctness. I found that I had perked up. I said, “I work with a lot of women.” This Mary said, “Well, just ignore spats and they go away. Don’t give little prissy fusses any attention and they will starve.”

My erstwhile feminist heart quavered. What on earth am I doing putting down women with a 98-year-old woman? Well, it quavered briefly. And then I said, “Well, it is tiring. I get sucked into the petty stuff all the time.” She grimaced and said, “You must like it or you wouldn’t.”

Ouch. I changed the subject. Tell me about the judges. She does. Especially the young one that she

raised. She told me that sometimes she just wanted to find a ladder and climb into her third-story office without having to chitchat her way through all the courthouse crowd. This was remarkable. I knew exactly what she was talking about; however, my office was on the ground floor, and all I would need to do is unlatch the window. This had real possibilities.

Thinking about God

She retired at 69 although they asked her to stay until 70. She told them “I can’t stand one more year of you and you can’t stand one more year of me.” I asked what she did when she quit work and she swept her hand around the walls of the room where there were delicate water-color pictures of birds in flight. She loved birds.

I told her about another resident of this nursing home—dead now—who could stand so still that the birds ate out of her hands and that anybody could if you stood still long enough. She snorted. No way.

She said her daughter lives in the next county and visits, though she is busy with grandchildren. She said “I don’t blame her; I was busy, too.” Another daughter only calls when she wants something. Mary could tell that it was that daughter by the way the phone rung. I said “You are kidding.” She said “Oh no, I am not.” And even with the

closer daughter, Mary said when she comes into her room, she steels herself. “She thinks she’s going to fix me somehow.”


I asked her what she does all day. She said she thinks about God all the time. All the time. I asked “What do you think?” And she said, “Indescribable.” We sat.

After a while it was time. I asked her if she wanted someone to bring communion and she said “yes.” I asked her if I could come back. Yes. I left that Mary to her pondering. I never saw her again. God rest her soul. Mother to her children, and to a judge, and most beautifully and profoundly to herself: She birthed herself into eternity.

Happy Mother’s Day. If you are a mother, thank God for you. Give your kids lots of advice and then tell them that you might be wrong. And that you are just sure as can be that they have what it takes to figure that out.

If you are not a mother, thank God for you, too. Don’t be surprised if somebody somewhere, maybe even a federal judge, thinks you are. 🌸

The Rev. Martha Sterne is associate rector of Holy Innocents’ Episcopal Church, Atlanta, and author of *Earthly Good: Seeing Heaven on Earth and Alive and Loose in the Ordinary: Stories of the Incarnation*. She is the daughter of Anna and mother of Charles and Anna.



Learning *from* Children

by Herbert Anderson

The Christian story begins with the birth of a powerless, needy infant child. In becoming the baby Jesus, an infinite God became a finite being for the sake of humankind. God's truth is embodied in a child that carries hope for the world.

The consequences of God taking on humanity at birth are that (1) children are capable of bearing the transcendent God; (2) we cannot know the fullness of God without knowing what it is to be a child; (3) we learn from children what it means to be fully human.

With those convictions in mind, what wisdom might adults learn from children?

Listening for the Wisdom of Children

When 12-year-old Jesus left the company of his parents to hang out with rabbis in the temple, we are told he astonished them with his wisdom and understanding (Luke 2:41–52).

Already the child Jesus knew more than his parents could see: He had a purpose that made it natural for him to be in the temple visiting with the rabbis. If the wisdom of the child Jesus is only in “obedience to his Father’s will,” adults miss an opportunity to imagine learning wisdom from children because children see what adults do not.

One of the gifts of having grandchildren is the privilege of reading Dr. Seuss to them. The genius of Dr. Seuss was his capacity to understand and write about the world as children might see and hear it.

In Seuss’ book, *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, a father instructs his son to be on the lookout for interesting sites as he walks to school. The resulting conversation reminds us of a family dinner when a parent turns to a child and asks eagerly, “So how was your day?” Seuss’ book illustrates why a child might just answer “nothing much.”

When Marco, the boy in the book, reports back to his father with a child’s vivid imagination, rather than from reality, his father replies: “Your eyesight’s much too keen. Stop telling such outlandish tales, Stop turning minnows into whales.”

Eventually, Marco tells his father what the father wants to hear: that he saw a plain horse and wagon on Mulberry Street. The appeal of Dr. Seuss for adults is that we never outgrow *childness* (characteristics of being a child that remain with us as adults) even though we may be reluctant to admit it.

In *Regarding Children: A New Respect for Childhood and Families*, a book I wrote with Susan B. W. Johnson, we offer three contradictions that help us rethink the relationship between childhood and adulthood:

- The child is fully human although what is present in

the child is yet to be realized. This challenges the belief that children are incomplete, and being a child is only temporary and inferior to adulthood.

- In becoming adults, we do not lose childhood. In fact, the process of becoming an adult might be described as “struggling toward childhood.”
- Regarding children as fully human, with equal worth to adults, means they have status in our families and society. And their rights will alter the rights of an adult. The story of Jesus in the temple reminds us that we cannot know the fullness of God or the wisdom of being human without listening to children and understanding what they see.

Wisdom refers to a relational, spiritual, and theological *knowing* that is more than information. As society becomes more dependent on technology, we are tempted to replace the wisdom needed for daily living with technical information or skill. It is too easy to equate technical knowledge with wisdom.

Wisdom, in the biblical understanding, is a gift from God that carries with it an expectation of living according to God’s will. Wisdom includes having wonder and compassion

towards all things. When people are wise, they have a way of seeing the mysteries and contradictions of life—yet still choosing to live faithfully to God's ways.

Characteristics of Childness

Being human, whether as children or adults, includes dependency, immediacy, and vulnerability. Adults can learn from this. If adults pay attention, children can teach them the wisdom of dependency and neediness and how those characteristics are important parts of being human.

Vulnerability. The heading in *The New York Times* sport's section was this: "Listening to Wisdom From a 10-Year-Old Son About His Head Injury" (Adam Buckley Cohen, November 29, 2009). The newspaper story was about a boy trying to decide whether to continue to play quarterback on a pee-wee football team.

In practice one day, he had a helmet-to-helmet hit with another player. He walked off the field, lay down, and fell asleep. Although the boy was found to have no concussion, he did not play the next game. In explaining why he didn't want to play, he told his father: "Dad, I'm scared. I only have one brain, and I don't want to hurt it playing football."

Although the boy played football again, the author of the article

(and father of the boy) concluded: "Once again, Will reminded me that no matter how many articles parents read, we can still learn plenty by listening to our children."

Because human beings begin life small, weak, and needy, without any built-in physical defense, we are vulnerable from the beginning. Eventually, we all learn to walk and run and get our own food and protect ourselves, but we never outgrow our susceptibility to being wounded. Sometimes, we are so intent on eliminating all vulnerability in our lives that we lose connection with our childness. Football helmets designed for protection have become weapons that reminded 10-year-old Will and his father how vulnerable we all are.

In reality, we are susceptible to being wounded long after we are no longer small, weak, and needy. When we are willing to acknowledge this vulnerability as a part of our humanity, we will also be more willing to be surprised by the wisdom of children or trust the mystery of God that is often hidden in the strength of weakness.

Dependence. The length of time we are dependent on the care and protection of others is a distinguishing characteristic of being human. Children need tender touch as well as food and shelter to survive infancy. By smiling, infants can invite someone to hold them, but they are

dependent on the response and care of others. As adults, we eventually can protect ourselves, we never outgrow our dependence.

Theologian Arthur McGill once observed in his book *Death and Life: An American Theology* that in the kingdom of Jesus, "we always begin with neediness, we always live toward neediness, and we always end in neediness." This vision of dependence is a norm both for being an adult and being Christian.

If the Christian life is marked by living in neediness, it is not surprising that being like a child is a mark of living faithfully. Preserving dependence as a quality of childness enriches and deepens living when one is an adult.

James Patterson's delightful novel *Sundays at Tiffanys*, written with Gabrielle Charbonnet, is a story of childness and the gift of imagination. At one point 8-year-old Jane's imaginary friend, Michael, is explaining to her why he must leave. "Children have imaginary friends to help guide them into their lives. We help children feel less alone, help them find their place in the world, in their families. But then, we must leave, have to..."

On Jane's ninth birthday, in spite of her protesting that she was not ready, Michael left her, as all imaginary friends must do so children can grow up to have real friends. As the novel unfolds, how-

ever, it challenges the assumption that adults do not need imaginary friends or that imaginary friends are not real. Adults are as dependent as children, only in a different way.

Immediacy. The immediacy of childhood allows for playfulness, quick hugs and kisses, and often (brutal) honesty in speech. The child's response to others is unfiltered and trusting. Although being an adult means not saying everything we think, we need to hold on to imagination and wonder and spontaneously responding as variations of immediacy that adults continue to learn from rediscovering childhood.

Changing How Parents Care for Children

Adults are more often concerned about nurturing and protecting children than learning from them. They wonder if a child's needs are being met by family and society. It is appropriate that adults worry about their children. They need our protection and our care.

The noblest work adults have to do, Martin Luther wrote in *Luther Works, Volume 45*, is to bring children up to serve God and the neighbor: "The greatest goal of married life, that which makes all suffering and labor worth while, is that God grants offspring and commands that they be brought up to worship and serve God" ("The

Estate of Marriage," *Luther Works*). To get children ready for the adult world, modern parents have offered them special treatment, including a kind of quarantine from both the pressures and rewards of society. As societies have become more complex, this time of "protected childhood" has been expanded even beyond adolescence.

Parents, under the guise of care, dishonor sons and daughters by hovering or invading or ordering their world excessively and inappropriately. Respect is not control. We can house their bodies, Kahlil Gibran wrote in *The Prophet*, but not their souls "because their souls dwell in a house of tomorrow you [parents] cannot visit, not even in your dreams."

It is an ongoing struggle for parents to keep a balance between too much and too little involvement in the lives of their children. The most loving thing parents can do for their children is to respect the integrity of their full humanity from birth, love and protect them fiercely, and then tenderly let them go.

If parents regard children as fully and completely human, it would be easier for them to respect and honor children—protecting them without indulging them. When a group of children was asked by their pastor why everyone must become like a child to enter the kingdom of heaven, 9-year-old Barry had clear

wisdom: "because if everyone was a child, then no one would hurt children anymore."

The biblical story parallels the human story of childhood, adulthood, and parental care of children. Because of Jesus, childness is not foreign to God. The picture of Jesus welcoming children is a radically new and more inclusive vision of the human community. Adults are invited to learn from children about being human and about being a disciple of Jesus. 🌸

The Rev. Dr. Herbert Anderson is an ELCA pastor, the father of two children and the grandfather of three. He has been a seminary professor for 40 years and currently also cooks dinners as the husband of the president of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary.

To Learn More

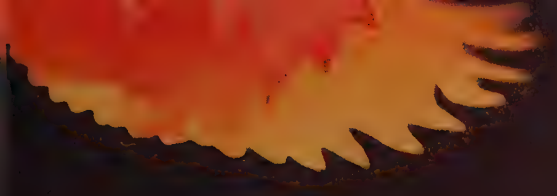
For further discussion of Dr. Seuss and *And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street*, see Herbert Anderson, "Sense and Nonsense in the Wisdom of Dr. Seuss" in *New Theology Review*, Volume 14, No. 3, August, 2001, pp. 37–50.

Regarding Children: A New Respect for Children and Families, Herbert Anderson and Susan B.W. Johnson, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994, pp. 9–28



THE WISDOM OF THE
SPIRIT

by Phyllis Kersten



THE HOLY SPIRIT GOES WITH US AS WE ARE
SENT OUT INTO THE WORLD—JUST AS THE
SPIRIT EQUIPPED THOSE FIRST DISCIPLES,
WITH STRENGTH, HUMILITY, AND COURAGE.

I don't know about you, but I think that there's one person of the Holy Trinity who gets short shrift.

It's not the first person of the Trinity, the One Jesus called Father. We only have to marvel at a newborn's tiny fingers or at our body's ability to heal after a broken bone to raise our praises to the God who made us and claimed us.

And the second person of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ? None of us would want to imagine life without the forgiveness of sins, without the incarnation that revealed God's love for this world—the One who by his suffering, death, and resurrection has transferred us from the realm of sin and death to the kingdom of life.

But the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit? We celebrate the Spirit's life and work on one Sunday of the church year—Pentecost—and maybe again on Holy Trinity Sunday. But after that it's as if the Holy Spirit slips from our mind and goes underground.

Benedictine author Joan Chittister speaks for many of us when she says: "Do I believe in the Holy Spirit? You bet I do." But then she

adds: "What I really believe is that the Holy Spirit is the most active, least honored presence of God in the Church" (*In Search of Belief*, p. 163).

How is the Holy Spirit active in our lives? And what might it look like if we did a better job of honoring the Spirit's wisdom and activity?

Guiding Us

In his high priestly prayer in John's Gospel, Jesus promises his disciples that they won't be left orphaned. Instead, the Father will give his disciples "another Advocate, to be with you forever" (John 14:16–18). This other Advocate or Helper, Jesus says, is the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Truth," who will guide us into all truth—teaching, reminding us of all that Jesus said and connecting us to the One who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Martin Luther writes of the activity of the Holy Spirit as he explains the third article of the Apostle's Creed: "I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened

me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith."

In William P. Young's recent bestseller, *The Shack*, the Trinity appears in unorthodox form to a father whose youngest daughter was tragically killed. The Holy Spirit is portrayed as "full of dynamic shades and hues of color and motion" (p. 128). She seems to spend much of her time gardening, and at one point she asks Mack, the father, to help her in the garden—to assist her in clearing out a tangled mess of flowers and thorns, which later, we discover, is Mack's heart.

The gardening imagery is an apt metaphor for the Holy Spirit's work of planting the Word of God's grace in us, helping us grow in faith and love, and pulling out the weeds and thorns of doubt and despair that choke out the faith blossoming in us. As Luther says, we couldn't come to faith on our own. It is the Holy Spirit who calls and keeps us in relationship to God our Creator and Redeemer.

FOR REFLECTION:

In your life, who has the Holy Spirit worked through “to call you by the Gospel”? Parents, a grandparent, pastor, Sunday school teacher, spouse, friend? How has the Spirit worked through you to call others to faith by the Gospel?

Sending Us

On that first Easter evening, the risen Christ visits his disciples behind locked doors. If it wasn’t for what Jesus did in their midst that night—show them his pierced hands and side and breathe on them his Holy Spirit—I think the disciples would still be in that locked room today.

But Jesus forgives them their denials and desertion, breathes on them and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit. As my Father has sent me, so I send you. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them” (John 20:23).

The Holy Spirit goes with us as we are sent out into the world—just as the Spirit equipped those first disciples, with strength, humility, and courage. We go out clothed with, and witnesses for, the forgiveness of sins. That’s the same commission Jesus gives his disciples right before his ascension in Luke 24:47–48 and Acts 1:8–11: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

FOR REFLECTION:

How does it shape our outreach that the Spirit sends us out clothed with, and witnesses for, the forgiveness of sins?

Helping Us Speak

On the day of Pentecost, “there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind,” and tongues of fire rested on the disciples. (See Acts chapter 2.) And these Galilean followers of Jesus—simple folks, not a single one of them graduates of Harvard or Yale—“began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” And each of those present, “from every nation under heaven,” heard them speaking in their own languages of “God’s deeds of power” in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That first Pentecost was a singular event, but I believe the Holy Spirit is still at work in us today, enabling us to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that others can hear it in their own language.

Even though our primary language is English or Spanish or Chinese, we all have other “primary languages” as well. They grow out of our vocation (as farmer or lawyer or nurse), our relationships (as mother, friend, daughter, sister), our age (Generation X or “the greatest generation”), our background (Southern rural or Mid-west urban), our personality (lighthearted or reflective). We honor the Spirit’s presence and activity in our lives when we become attuned to communicating the good news of God’s love so that people can hear it in their own language. (These examples of other languages are from Norma Cook Everist’s chapter, “Learn to Share Christ in the Languages of People’s Daily Lives,” in *Christian Education as Evangelism*, p. 125.)

FOR REFLECTION:

To whom is the Holy Spirit calling you to share God's good news in that person's "mother tongue"?

Surprising Us

Some have suggested that the biblical book that we know as "The Acts of the Apostles" should really be called "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." Throughout Acts, it is the Spirit who is at work in the outreach and ministry of people like Peter and Paul and Phillip, Priscilla and Aquila.

In Acts 16 we are told that Paul and his companions "were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia," and "the Spirit of Jesus" prevented them also from entering Bithynia. Later that same night, Paul had a vision of a man pleading, "Come over to Macedonia and help us," and setting sail, they arrive in Philippi, a leading city of Macedonia. And what do they find there?

Surprisingly, not the man who summoned them in Paul's vision, but a group of women at prayer. Among that group is Lydia, a merchant who bought and sold purple cloth. God opens Lydia's heart to Paul's message, and she and her whole household are baptized, becoming the first converts in Europe.

For us, too, today, the Holy Spirit closes some doors in our outreach and ministry—as individuals and the Women of the ELCA and the church—and opens other doors. We honor the Holy Spirit's activity by being open and responsive to the surprises the Spirit has in store for us.

FOR REFLECTION:

Where has the Holy Spirit closed some doors to you—individually, for the Women of the ELCA, for your congregation? Where has the Holy Spirit surprised you with other open doors?

Changing Us

In Acts we read that there were certain women, including Mary the Mother of Jesus (Acts 1:13–14), who were part of that larger community of Jesus' followers gathered in that upper room in Jerusalem. They were waiting and praying for the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Though we generally picture the Pentecost event as involving the 11 disciples (plus Matthias, added in Acts 1 to replace Judas), women were in that number on whom the tongues of fire rested. Perhaps that is why Peter opened his sermon with a quote from the prophet Joel:

"In the last days it will be, God declares,
That I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy."
(Acts 2:16–17)

Out of all of the men and women who were there, it was Mary alone who knew how the Spirit's overshadowing could change a life forever. Mary honored the Spirit's activity by magnifying the Lord (Luke 1:46) and by treasuring and pondering all that had happened to her and her son in her heart (Luke 2:19).

My friend Darlene has been on a journey of grief after the death of her mother at 98. A teacher and farmer's wife, her mother was a remarkable faith-filled woman. Darlene has taken the time to grieve her

mother's absence and to treasure the ways her mother was a blessing.

Lately Darlene has begun to experience "a space within her," where her mother was. "It is not an *empty hole*," she says, "but a *space*." It has provided room inside for her to care about others: a young colleague who has been diagnosed with stage-four cancer, and another woman who Darlene's mother had befriended in the care center.

I think it is the Holy Spirit who creates spaces like that within us when we take time to treasure the gifts we have been given in life and to grieve our losses. In a sense we, too, like Mary, are overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, and space is created in us to bear Christ to the world.

FOR REFLECTION:
For whom has the Holy Spirit
created space in your heart?
To whom might the Holy Spirit
need you to bear Christ?

Bringing Us New Life

In Genesis 1, "in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth," the NRSV says that "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." Other translations say that the spirit of God "hovered" or "brooded" over the waters, much like an eagle or mother hen would hover over its baby chicks. So God's Holy Spirit—who was there at creation—continues to hover, watching over the church and world, working to bring about a new creation. Chittister reminds us that in the Wisdom literature in Scripture the Spirit is called "Holy Wisdom" or "Sophia." Chittister goes on:

"Scripture calls the Spirit *ruah*, a feminine word, to describe the feminine aspect of the Godhead, the

breath of God, the mighty wind that hovered over the empty waters at the beginning of life in the process of Creation—all feminine images of a birthing, mothering God, of pregnant waiting, and waters breaking, and life coming forth" (*In Search of Belief*, p. 167).

The waters that the Spirit hovers over are the waters of our baptism. Daily the Spirit works through these waters to give us new birth, to nurture us, and bring us to full life in Christ.

In both 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, Paul speaks of the differing gifts given by the "one Spirit," given for the building up of the body of Christ: faith, wisdom, healing, discernment, ministry, teaching, generous giving, leadership, cheerfulness. And in Galatians 5:22–23, Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."

Chittister calls the Holy Spirit "God's energizing presence among us, the life force that drives us beyond ourselves" (p. 162). Only when the Holy Spirit energizes us, drives us beyond ourselves, can we exercise our particular gifts for the common good.

And so we pray: Come, Holy Spirit, come! Let us honor you by using our gifts for the sake of others. 🙏

FOR REFLECTION:
What gifts have you been given
by the Spirit for the sake of the
whole church? Pray that the
Spirit will bring that gift to new
birth in you.

The Rev. Phyllis Kersten is a retired ELCA pastor from Forest Park, Ill. She was a co-author of the 1990 Women of the ELCA Bible study, "Companions on Your Journey."



LET US PRAY

Wisdom Stories

by Julie K. Aageson

"...I want you to be wise in what is good."

ROMANS 16:19

On the Saturday night

before Easter when we come together for the service of the Easter Vigil, part of the ritual is to remember who we are. To do this, we gather around the baptismal font in a darkened church where the flicker of candlelight and an occasional shuffling of feet are all that accompany the readings of the whole story of salvation.

There in the quiet stillness of Easter eve, we listen to one familiar story after another, a vivid recounting of God's activity among God's people. Creation, flood, covenants made, covenants broken, captivity and deliverance, bones that take on flesh and life with God's very breath—one story after another of a faithful God whose presence among us down through the ages is compelling, mysterious, transforming and yes, wise.

The church, the Body of Christ, is a place of living stories drawing us deeper into the drama of salvation and the wonder and mystery of a gracious, all-loving God. Our weekly worship invites us to a new way of being in the world. As we pay attention to the pattern of the liturgy, to the cycles of the church year, and to the multi-layered meanings in the biblical stories, we discover God's wisdom again and again.

In a culture that often seems distracted and lacking in wisdom, I prize this sabbath time for washing in wisdom! I prize the stories, the words, and the actions—no matter how disappointing or feeble our attempts may be. All of life is altered and transformed by the glimpses these things provide of a God whose love

will not let us go. No matter how frustrating or inadequate the church may be, it is here that the saving stories of God's love are proclaimed and enacted.

Centuries of telling and retelling, interpreting and reinterpreting the biblical stories help convey the deep wisdom found in Scripture.

The biblical narratives free us from self-absorption by pointing us away from ourselves toward others and our Creator God. Their themes are both simple and profound—God's overwhelming love for humankind and all of creation and God's admonishment to love the neighbor as oneself—words of grace that echo across all the centuries.

In his book, *The Gates of the Forest*, Elie Wiesel says that God made us because God loves stories. I like to think that God chose stories as a way of imparting wisdom, a way to help us "be wise in what is good."

The stories of Scripture are signs and symbols that convey the wisdom of God. I like to think of the biblical stories as prayers, passed from generation to generation, telling us who we are and who God is, wisdom for sustaining us along life's journey.

O Wisdom, who came from the mouth of the most high and reaches from one end to another, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence. Amen. ☸

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.

The Death Penalty *by Victor Thasiah*

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The ELCA social statement on the death penalty is available for free download at www.elca.org/socialstatements. You can order a free printed copy online at that address or by calling 800-638-3522, ext. 2996.

In 1991, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted a social statement on the death penalty. The text begins by considering the long-standing relationship between violence and community. "Violent crime has a powerful, corrosive effect on society. Bonds of trust, the very assumptions that allow us to live our lives in security and peace, break down. Instead of loving, we fear our neighbor. We especially fear the stranger."

After recognizing the harm, anger, sorrow, and injustice involved in the aftermath of violence, the statement identifies and acknowledges our vulnerabilities to both feelings of revenge and fantasies of simple solutions.

What was the state of the death penalty question in the ELCA at the time? Admitting the controversial nature of the issue, the text

reads, "While we all look to the Word of God and bring our reason to the death penalty issue, we can and do assess it with some diversity."

It is important to note that the social statement itself regards the deliberation of the ELCA on this matter as unfinished. A section in the endnotes sets out common arguments for and against capital punishment. The statement presents shared affirmations, a restorative approach to the topic, how justice and capital punishment are related, and resulting ELCA commitments.

The government's God-given, protective role, specifically expressed in the form of execution, is immediately acknowledged. "God entrusts the state with power to take human life when failure to do so constitutes a clear danger to society." The social statement qualifies this view, though, guarding against any over-eager interpretation. "[T]his does not mean that governments have an unlimited right to take life" or "must punish crime by death." At this early point in the document, the text already openly questions whether it is even possible to administer the death penalty justly.

By the end, the social statement concludes that it is not.

The statement cites Scripture that supports the Christian calling to “respond to violent crime in the restorative way taught by Jesus and shown by his actions.” What does this mean? The restorative justice approach involves “addressing the hurt of each person whose life has been touched by violent crime.”

The statement claims that such an approach “makes the community safer for all,” although it leaves unaddressed the question of how it might do so. (This is an opportunity for the ELCA criminal justice social statement currently in process.)

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

The social statement presents an opposition to capital punishment. Three reasons are offered in support for the ELCA’s position: 1) executions represent an unacceptable, non-restorative approach to violent crime; 2) executions can reinforce social injustice; and 3) the death penalty cannot possibly be administered justly.

The state and society’s excessive focus on the violent offender coupled with the consistent disinterest in victim well-being (including

the well-being of family and others negatively affected by crime) primarily characterize this unacceptable, non-restorative approach. In addition, executions deny the opportunity for offender “conversion and restoration.”

The second reason, the claim that executions can reinforce patterns of social injustice, is explained this way:

Violent crime is, in part, a reminder of human failure to ensure justice for all members of society. People often respond to violent crime as though it were exclusively a matter of the criminal’s individual failure. The death penalty exacts and symbolizes the ultimate personal retribution. Yet, capital punishment makes no provable impact on the breeding grounds of violent crime. Executions harm society by mirroring and reinforcing existing injustice. The death penalty distracts us from our work toward a just society. It deforms our response to violence at the individual, familial, institutional, and systemic levels. It perpetuates cycles of violence. . . . Lutheran Christians have called for an assault on the root causes of violent crime, an assault for which executions are no substitute.

The irony should provoke thought—the permanent incapacitation of violent offenders by execu-

tion actually “perpetuates cycles of violence.”

Finally, the text argues that it is impossible to administer capital punishment justly. “The race of the victim plays a role in who is sentenced to death and who is sentenced to life imprisonment, as do gender, race, mental capacity, age, and affluence of the accused.” The imperfectability of the system combined with the irreversibility of the practice grounds this church’s position.

The social statement sums up its opposition: “The practice of the death penalty undermines any possible moral message we might want to ‘send.’ It is not fair and fails to make society better or safer. The message conveyed by an execution, reflected in the attention it receives from the public, is one of brutality and violence.”

The statement then concludes with ELCA commitments that range from the welcome and care of everyone connected to the criminal justice system to ongoing deliberation and advocacy for reform along the lines developed in the social statement. ☞

Victor Thasiah is ELCA assistant director for studies, Church in Society.



Wise in What is Good

by Sarah Henrich

BIBLE STUDY

Theme Verse

ROMANS 16:19

I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil.

Prayer

Blessed Lord, you have filled our lives with so many witnesses. We are bound together with those who have gone before us and with those who will follow us. You have placed us in communities and called upon us to love one another as you have loved us. You have called upon us to serve as you have served us. Fill us with gratitude to all who have loved and served us, especially. . .

As they have done, may we too show forth your gracious love in our words and deeds. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Memory is essential to building networks. At the 2008 Minnesota state fair, there was a wonderful program, "Old Minnesota: Song of the North Star." Photos projected on a large screen gave viewers glimpses of life in the early days of statehood, especially pictures of farm families at work or at rest. Music brought home some

of the realities of those early days. The show put before us modern-day visitors the successes and failures, the joys and tragedies that had helped make the state what it is today. We heard a powerful song, "Keep your hand on the land," accompanying pictures of immigrants working very hard to build a life here.

At the same time we were reminded that the land had been the home of many American Indians whom the immigrants consigned to a tiny reservation. This show helped us remember the huge network of people, past and present, who have created the places, attitudes, beliefs, and institutions we live in daily.

In Romans 16, Paul calls upon his memories of people who have shared the joyful and difficult work of evangelizing along the northern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. In this final chapter of his letter, he completes the move from a more abstract address to stereotyped representatives of certain groups (for example, the Gentiles in Romans 1) to naming specific people who are in Rome or are known to the Roman Christians. We'll begin with a look at how Paul remembers these people in his letter and why.

1. What memories do you think we as a nation are losing? What important truths will be forgotten if we lose those memories? Is there any way to continue to remind people of their shared past while also embracing the present and future?

The Network: Names

In our day, networks are often electronic. Some of us surf the Internet to find information or products we need, to make our voices heard in diverse groups, and to be in touch with family and friends. Many of us watch an assortment of television networks or listen to radio stations that are part of a network of stations.

All these electronic networks enable us to be “in touch” (though not literally) in ways that we have grown quite accustomed to. But in Paul’s day, there was no way to amplify or transmit the human voice so that it could be heard miles away. There was no way to send a picture of events or people in one place to people in another. So networks were built up among people face to face and then were continued by letter—for those lucky enough to be able to read and write, or to know someone with those skills. A letter was part of building a network.

Since Paul had never been to Rome, he was not familiar with the assemblies of believers there nor did he know the local leaders of those assemblies. By means of this letter, he seeks to become part of the network of believers in Rome and to remind the Romans of other believers throughout the empire of which their city was capital.

Paul always tries to hold up that big picture for his readers and hearers. Whether he is writing to small communities in rural Galatia or to larger groups in the great cities of Rome and Corinth, Paul is eager to remind his readers and hearers that they are not the whole church—they are no more than (and no less than) a member of the body of Christ. Individuals were members of the body, and so were groups.

Many believe that part of Paul’s point in writing his letters to Romans is to help finance his planned mission to Spain. His desire for the support of the Romans makes his network very important; he trusts that the people he names in chapter 16 will vouch for him to the other Romans.

It may surprise you that a great deal can be learned about the early Christian mission from looking at the names and greetings in Romans 16:1–16.

2. Read Romans 16:1–6 together in your group. What kinds of things do you notice about this list?

Among other things, this list does not seem to be highly organized. Paul greets women and men, individuals and couples, even a few whose names he doesn’t quite recall. Who hasn’t had that experience!

Some of the people he names we know from other parts of our New Testament, especially Prisca and Aquila (verse 3) who are important in Acts 18:1–3, 18, 26; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19. Prisca is also known as Priscilla, the diminutive or familiar form of her name (as, for instance, Betty is to Elizabeth). She is only one of the women whose names are sprinkled throughout the list. Paul does not highlight the women nor diminish them. He does not do a list of men and then a list of women. Rather, both women and men seem to be named almost as Paul thinks of them. We can almost imagine him pacing around an ancient stone floor muttering to himself, “Now who else do I know in Rome?”

Paul had worked with Prisca and Aquila in several cities. The couple had left Rome when the emperor banished all Jews from the city in about the year 49 (and the emperor didn’t make a distinction between those Jews who recognized Jesus as Lord and those who did not).

It’s important for Paul to remember Prisca and Aquila in this letter to the Romans a decade or more later. They are a living reminder of the danger to Jews in Rome; any kind of tumult could be blamed on the Jews, who would then be punished. Part of Paul’s letter to the Romans is to remind them of their responsibility to the Jews, both those who recognized Jesus and Lord and those who did not.

Recall how Paul called for “sober thinking” in Romans 12:3. Sober thinking includes not allowing oneself to be so confident that one becomes arrogant or superior and causes trouble and dissension. Prisca and Aquila had lived through such trouble and its aftermath. Paul goes on to mention Mary, a Jewish name, and Andronicus and Junia, another missionary couple. Notice in verse 12 Tryphaena and Tryphosa, both women who are well enough known to the Romans that Paul names them and asks to be remembered to them.

All those to whom Paul wants to be remembered presumably know him; they would be able to speak of him to their fellow Romans. As Paul asks the readers and hearers of this letter to greet people for him, he is providing an opportunity for those people to be asked about him.

Because this is a letter of introduction, it is very important for Paul to have as many people as possible speak on his behalf. This is especially true in the case of wanting to raise money: Paul needs lots of recommendations for fundraising for his mission trip to Spain.

One woman we do not know from other places in the New Testament nor from early Christian history is Phoebe, the first person to be commended by Paul in 16:1–2. These very interesting verses show us a little of how the early communities did business.

Paul’s commendation of Phoebe in this letter has a distinct purpose. Not only is it possible that she may be carrying this letter from Paul whose commendation creates trust in her, but Paul asks the Romans to support Phoebe. What does he mean? We don’t know for sure, of course. We do know that the Romans are asked to “welcome” Phoebe, that is, to do what is required for her upbuilding, to treat her as a friend.

They are also asked to help Phoebe in whatever she may require; that is, Paul uses this early Christian shorthand to ask them to provide monetary support for her. She had been Paul’s benefactor, and Paul owed her. Now he asks the Romans to be her benefactors for the

sake of the gospel.

Phoebe was a deacon of the church in Cenchreae, a town very near Corinth. We do not know exactly what a deacon is at this early date, but it seems to suggest an official role in that community as Paul uses it here and in Philippians 1:1. Likewise, the word translated “benefactor” can also describe in Greek a role such as a president or presider, one who gathers a community and leads it. What exactly Phoebe’s role was in Cenchreae is lost in history. Suffice it to say that she played a pivotal role, probably financially and in leadership activities, in a house church. (See “Wisdom has Blessed Us” on p. 6.)

IF TIME PERMITS: PHOEBE, CHLOE, LYDIA, PHILEMON

Perhaps Phoebe’s role was akin to that of Philemon or Chloe. See more about how heads of households might also be leaders in the local gathering of the saints in Paul’s Letter to Philemon and 1 Corinthians 1:11. Read about the role of Lydia in Acts 16:14–15, 40. Note that the Letter to Philemon makes clear that Philemon supported believers with either direct financial aid or with in-kind support. Paul uses the word “refresh” as one way to speak of providing material support. Paul is not shy in highlighting this support or about asking it or about being grateful for it. (See “Growing through Giving” p. 36.)

Why would Paul work so hard to remember all these names? We have seen how important it is to establish himself as part of the same network with the Romans. He provides some clues about the kind of network it is and about how people are valued in this network by the descriptions he uses.

3. What happens among us when we remember that God's church in Christ is an extensive network of worshipping Christians throughout the world? What does it mean to understand ourselves as members of a network or body with believers with whom we disagree? Do Paul's words in Romans 14:1–17 help us as we try to imagine living in this body of very diverse members?

The Network: Titles and Descriptions

A quick word about *benefaction* is in order here. In English, a benefit is something good that comes one's way. A benefaction is the giving of a benefit. A benefactor is one who bestows a benefit or benefaction. In the ancient world, most business was carried out in an exchange of benefits. Someone socially higher up than you would do you a favor (bestow a benefaction) and you would be obligated to demonstrate loyalty and return an equal or better gift. The very wealthy, a tiny percentage of the population, were in a position to grant many benefits or benefactions. By doing this, they created another kind of network: a network of obligation, of duty owed. This was the ordinary way of doing business and created strong networks of loyalty to a benefactor or patron.

4. Have you ever been in a position where someone offered you something that you felt you just could not accept? We usually learn, sometimes at an unspoken level, which gifts might obligate us to the giver more than we care to be obligated. Recall a time when an offered gift made you uncomfortable. If you are free to describe the gift, the situation, and your feelings, please do so.

In the ancient world, people often had no choice but to seek a benefaction from a patron, whether it made them uncomfortable or not. If someone needed a loan, wanted to see a doctor, needed to get a roof fixed, wanted to buy a farm animal, was looking for someone to marry a daughter, wanted to run for office—he or

she would normally turn to a benefactor, knowing that not only the money would be owed, but also a show of respect and a willingness to come to the patron's aid.

It is very interesting that Jesus never took money or gifts or sought loyalty from those he fed or healed or otherwise assisted. Paul likewise did not take money from the people among whom he worked, lest he be obligated to them rather than remaining free to say what needed to be said and leave when the time was right. Phoebe had been a "benefactor of many." She had contributed to their wellbeing, even to Paul's. Paul is repaying her generosity by his recommendation and request that she receive help in turn.

5. Do you think we seek loyalty from people today? How? Is there a way that an exchange of gifts or services obligates people to each other? Where do you see that in our culture, if you do? Do you think this is a beneficial or harmful practice, or something in between?
6. Before we move on, let's explore the way Paul describes some of the people he knows in Rome. Who are they? Fill in the phrases that describe the person using the chart on p. 34.

It's quite a list, isn't it? Some of these are the names of slaves and some of free people. Some are of Latin origin, some Greek, and some seem likely to have been Jewish. We do not know most of these names from anywhere else in the New Testament. It is as if these people pop momentarily into view and remind us of a large number of the faithful whose names went unrecorded or have been lost to us. How blessed we are to have this list from Paul, precisely because it shows us the variety of this crowd of believers who would support Paul in his efforts.

It is just this kind of list that reminds us the early Christian missions and communities depended on multiple people. Paul wasn't simply being politically

Names	Description
<i>Phoebe</i>	
<i>Prisca and Aquila</i>	
<i>Epaenetus</i>	
<i>Mary</i>	
<i>Andronicus and Junia</i>	
<i>Ampliatius</i>	
<i>Urbanus</i>	
<i>Stachys</i>	
<i>Apelles</i>	
<i>Family of Aristobulus</i>	
<i>Herodion</i>	
<i>Family of Narcissus</i>	
<i>Tryphaena and Tryphosa</i>	
<i>Persis</i>	
<i>Rufus</i>	
<i>The mother of Rufus</i>	
<i>Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Parobas, Hermas, and those with them</i>	
<i>Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, Olympas, and all the saints who are with them</i>	

correct about inclusivity in Romans 12 when he spoke of one body and many functions. Even though when we read the Bible we get a feeling that Paul and the other apostles (as well as the prophets before them, including Moses) were lone voices speaking for God, we know that it just doesn't work that way. It takes, if we may paraphrase a bit, "a community to empower a preacher." It takes a community to empower a prophet. It takes everyone on the table above, including the unnamed persons and then some. It takes you and me, the toes, the little fingers, the eyelashes, right down to

the smallest particle to make a body work. Romans reminds us that Apostle Paul knows this and cares deeply about that body, the place where we trust that the Spirit of the living Christ is active, alive, and calling us to service.

Final Words (We Made It!)

Paul doesn't quite seem to know when to end this letter! He sends one last word of instruction, followed by a typical closing to a letter in verses 21-23. Then he comes back to a prayer that mentions one last time

God's passion for the Gentiles which has at last been revealed. Perhaps he finds it hard to stop because not only does he know how vital the whole body of Christ is to the work and glory of God, he also knows how fragile it is.

7. Consider your own body or that of someone close to you.

Have you ever had occasion to notice how one little change begins a whole flood of changes in the body? Sometimes taking a medication for one thing, say high blood pressure, gets you on a fast train to taking all kinds of medications for things you didn't even know were wrong.

The larger body of Christ, just like each of our bodies, is a system. Both within us and among us, small changes affect the whole, often quite unpredictably. Paul's awareness of how easy it is to make one wrong decision that expands beyond the ability of the body to heal itself. Paul, therefore (if I may borrow Paul's style here), does two things. He warns the Romans of dangers that they might be tempted to dismiss. He prays for their strength.

Ending and Summary

Paul longs for his hearers to be "wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil" (Romans 16:18). It is God, he says (16:25) who now strengthens believers, the same God had revealed the "mystery kept secret for long ages," that there is one, only one, wise God who has reached out to bring all to faith and obedience. This grace, disclosed through our Lord Jesus Christ empowers all the baptized to live in a new covenant relationship with God and with each other. We dare to join our Roman ancestors in the faith and Paul himself, saying "Amen."

We have come full circle. What Paul laments in the beginning of Romans, all the ways in which humanity has misperceived God or has turned away from serving God, no longer hold us bound. We are no lon-

ger clients of sin and death, forced to act as if they are in charge of our lives. We are clients or slaves, as Paul so often says, of God, free to offer ourselves to God's service.

We can picture Romans as a great arch. Chapters 1 and 16 are the ends set into the ground, but it is chapter 8 that is the keystone and keeps the arch up and open. Of all that Paul has said in Romans, it is 8:31 that expresses his driving passion and also our own.

Closing

Pray together the prayer for the commemoration of the Conversion of St. Paul, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 55.

"O God, by the preaching of your apostle Paul you have caused the light of the gospel to shine throughout the world. Grant that we may follow his example and be witnesses to the truth of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."


Hymn

"In Christ There Is No East or West," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 650, verses 3 and 4. 🌿

The Rev. Sarah Henrich is professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

Upcoming Bible Studies

Next month, we will begin a three-session study on prayer written by the Rev. Gladys Moore. The sessions will be posted on the Web site, www.lutheranwomantoday.org, in May. In September we'll start our nine-session study, "The People of God: Unity in the Midst of Diversity" by the Revs. Linda Johnson Seyenkulo and D. Jensen Seyenkulo.

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a grey watering can, pouring water onto a cluster of purple flowers. The person is wearing a light blue shirt. The background is blurred, showing more of the garden. A dark purple rounded rectangle with white text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

"As we give, we grow. Giving to the church is what sowing is to gardening. It plants possibilities. Both the givers and the receivers benefit in the process."

Growing Through Giving

by Kathryn Hauelsen Cashen

Which is greater: the church's need for our gifts or our need to give the gifts? On the surface it seems obvious the church's needs are the greater of the two. The ELCA has been faced with painful decisions about how to reduce expenses in response to reduced financial resources.

The first couple of years I was a director of one of our ELCA outdoor ministry sites, our revenue didn't cover expenses. It wasn't fun telling the dedicated year-round staff, "Thanks for your hard work. Don't cash your paychecks until I make sure they won't bounce." We got through those days in large part because of the generosity of people who saw the camp's potential and started giving generously and consistently. They encouraged others to do likewise. Their giving attitude spread. Today that ministry is in a major construction phase with new buildings cropping up all over the camp and full weeks of campers all summer. Donors made the difference.

So it seems obvious the church and its related agencies and partners need our financial gifts. Nonetheless, I maintain our need to give surpasses the church's need to receive our gifts.

We—people of faith who are collectively the church—live in two worlds. One world is the physical, visible, concrete, tangible world of church buildings and staff. There is another, invisible, but just as real reign of God. This reign is here now, through us. We are literally the body of Christ alive and at work for good in the world today. God's will does get done—with or without our active participation in the process. We and those we care about benefit as we participate in the process.

This is where our need to give surpasses the church's need to receive our gifts. In Matthew 6:21 Jesus tells us, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Jesus is the head of this intangible, but very real body of Christ at work in the world today.

PAY IT FORWARD

In the Bible study, Sarah Henrich explains how in Roman times it was common for those who had wealth to become benefactors to those who needed their financial resources. In exchange, those receiving assistance would be expected to show loyalty to the benefactor. Christ does things differently. He neither asks for help

nor bargains for loyalty with those he helps. Rather, he supplies what we need, and then asks us to go help others. God's economy isn't a score-keeping process. Rather, it is a pay it forward process. God gives to us so that we can give to others.

Let's look carefully at the Matthew 6:21 passage where Jesus tells us: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Where: We put our financial and other resources in a physical place. It might be real estate, banks, various securities, gold, or other forms of investments. What comes to us has to be located in some specific physical place.

Your treasure is: We generally have access to far more resources than we realize. Over the course of our working lives most of us earn and spend millions of dollars. Much of this slips away from us so gradually we seldom realize just how much influence we have in terms of tangible assets.

There will be: This is a classic cause and effect situation. One action leads directly to another action or reaction. Our local, financial daily decisions have long-term global consequences.

Your heart also: We might interpret this to mean our focus or our interest and passion.

We often claim that money follows passion. We invest in what we have a passion about. For example, someone with a passion for sewing can easily justify spending money on fabric and sewing equipment. Someone whose passion is travel, can easily justify spending hundreds of dollars on an exciting trip. Those who maintain collections readily spend to add to their collection.

THE REVERSE IS ALSO TRUE

Where we invest our money influences what we care about. For example, if we have money invested in the stock market, we're more likely to follow stock market reports than those who do not invest funds there. We're much more interested in the well-being of the places we support financially than other equally active organizations where we have no financial investment.

Let's be clear: we do not need to give in order to bribe God to do something for us. God already has done everything for us and continues to love us regardless of how we respond. However, giving directs our hearts and minds back toward God. Giving increases our awareness of God's movements around us. Giving is a tangible form of prayer. It's good to pray for those who are hungry. It's more effective

to pray and then follow up with donations of cash or food items to those who feed the hungry.

So why give? We might as well ask why breathe, or eat, or sleep. Giving is basic to our spiritual well-being just as these physical actions are to our physical well-being. Why give? Because:

1) God tells us to do so repeatedly in the Bible. This is God's way to help us form the giving habit. Responsible parents remind their children to brush their teeth until this becomes a habit. So, too, we need to be reminded repeatedly to develop the giving habit because this is good for our spiritual, emotional, and financial health.

2) Giving sets our priorities. We will invest our treasures in something. Giving helps us leave a legacy that lasts long after we pass away. Our giving helps the places and causes we care about. It also demonstrates to our children, grandchildren, and others that giving is an important part of living.

3) Giving encourages others. Even the smallest donation enclosed with a heart-felt "thank you for your ministry" can make the difference between despair and real hope for those doing ministry on small budgets.

4) Giving influences others. As we give and talk about where and why we give, we influence others to consider doing the same.

5) Giving is good financial discipline. As we learn to manage our financial resources through giving, we put our appetite for impulse purchases on a diet. We may find ourselves thinking, "The cost of that new coat I don't really need would cover the cost of supplies for a whole classroom of children at church."

6) Giving connects us. The more we invest in a place such as our local church, the more connected we feel to that place and the people who gather there.

7) Giving opens us up to new adventures. We may start with a very modest gift. Then we start getting a newsletter or e-mail about what the church or organization is doing. Soon we find ourselves exploring all sorts of new possibilities we'd never before considered.

GROWING THE GIVING HABIT

Start small. Expect your giving to grow, just as your skill level grows when you study a foreign language, learn to play a musical instrument, or exercise. Bit by bit, day by day, check by check is far more effective than "binge giving" that overwhelms you, and sets up a precedent you cannot maintain.

Find ways to develop giving habits that works for you. For example, put all your loose change in a jar, and when it's full convert it to a check to give away. Set aside what

ou saved on your grocery store referred-customer card and give that away. When you get a \$10 dollar bill in change, ask for a \$5 dollar bill and five singles so you can set aside one single to give away.

Make a list of places you want to support: your congregation, one or more favorite charities, organizations, or institutions that are important to you. Determine what you can give each of them. Decide if you'll give a gift annually, quarterly, monthly, or weekly. Keep a log. With a clear conscience you can tell those who request a gift that you've already made your giving budget for the year. Your list might include a "miscellaneous" category to cover your neighborhood coat sales or other things that will undoubtedly come up along the way. Make a budget and start with what you want to give first. Budgets are marching orders for dollars. You can change directions as often as circumstances dictate.

Start where you are financially. Use what you already have. Do what you can. Trust the rest to God who takes our meager offerings and magnifies them many times over. Several years ago I got behind financially. I decided the long-range solution was to eliminate a car payment from my monthly expenses. I am not very disciplined about putting aside extra money each month to pay off the loan faster. After a few

months of this increased effort, I got a letter from an attorney. One of my father's cousins died and named me, along with others, in her will. The amount of money she left me was just about exactly what the outstanding balance was on that car loan. We cannot outgive God. But it can be very exciting trying to do so.

We each have an optimum weight, level of daily exercise, and amount of nightly sleep that will promote our highest levels of health. Maintaining these levels requires effort, but the pay off in terms of energy and feeling good makes it worth the effort.

Likewise, we each have a specific proportion of our resources that we can commit to giving and saving for the future. Establishing and maintaining these levels takes time and effort. However, once we can establish a habit of proportional giving and saving, we gain a sense of peace that cannot be measured in dollars.

We'll know we've found the right level of giving and saving when we have a sense of being in control of our financial destiny rather than constantly being caught up in circumstances beyond our control. As we cultivate the financial habits of sharing first, saving next, and spending the balance wisely, we grow in our sense of accomplishment, productivity, and purpose.

This goes a long way toward reducing financial stress and establishing a safety net for ourselves.

As we give, we grow. Giving to the church is what sowing is to gardening. It plants possibilities. Both the givers and the receivers benefit in the process. 🌱

The Rev. Kathryn Hauelsen Cashen has served congregations in Texas and Ohio. Now semi-retired, she helps non-profit organizations reach big goals with small budgets. Visit her Web site at www.kathyhauelsen.com for more information.

Women of the ELCA STEWARDSHIP RESOURCES

Women of the ELCA offers several free resources on stewardship and giving. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org to find the 2009–2010 *Stewardship Planning Guide* and *Thankoffering Service* workbooks. Also available is *Faithful Stewardship*, a report that shows how we use your gifts and reveals how your offerings are essential to our partnership in mission. Another new resource, *Grace-full Living*, helps us understand how to become financially healthy.

There's a little bit of Katie in all of us.

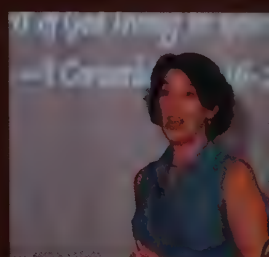
Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She was also the dedicated partner of her husband, Martin. The example she set as a wife and mother, farmer, entrepreneur, leader, and caregiver continues to inspire us today.

Through Katie's Fund, Women of the ELCA honors her life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith.



Katharina von Bora Luther

Won't you help continue Katie's legacy? Support Katie's Fund!



Make a difference by sending your gift to either the annual fund to meet immediate needs or the endowment fund. Send to:



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RACE NOTES

Young Teachers

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



I'd like to tell you about

four children who have taught me a lot about Holy Communion.

Andy—now a dad himself—was four years old then, and our congregation offered younger children only a blessing at the communion rail. As the assisting minister gave Andy's dad bread one Sunday morning, Andy asked, "Why can't I have Jesus too?" Andy knew that Jesus was the bread and that Jesus loved him. Yes, Andy wanted Jesus too. Shortly after, that congregation began communing younger children. Sometimes adults get too intellectual about our worship. The understanding of a four-year-old brings us back, helping us see that Jesus is our bread.

Two-year-old Christian was taking a bath, playing with some toys. He filled a plastic margarine tub with bath water and lifted it up in front of him. "What you are doing?" his mother asked. Christian replied in a certain tone, "Thanksgiving!" Christian had seen the pastor lift up the cup in thanksgiving, remembering the blessings given to us by God. Christian reminded me that at meals, in the bath, while driving on the freeway, we are called to offer God thanks.

Danielle was five years old when she and I talked about communion one December evening. She loved to sing, and she particularly liked the "Holy, Holy, Holy" we had sung that evening at a combined potluck dinner and Eucharist. I asked if she had heard the words leading up to the "Holy, Holy, Holy," how we join our voices in singing

with all the saints, all those who have gone before us. Since Danielle's grandmother had recently died, I thought it might comfort her to think she was singing with her grandmother. So I tried to explain our singing with the saints. There was a long silence. "I don't want to commune with King Herod. He's not a nice guy," Danielle replied. Danielle reminded me of the breadth of communion, how we really are joining with *all* those who have died, the ones we loved and the ones who were hard to love.

My two-year-old grandson is building his vocabulary now, often repeating out loud what he hears—even in worship. Not long ago he was listening closely to the words of institution. "Eat . . . bread . . . drink. . . . cup . . . feast!" he repeated loudly. Yes, he had all the basics as well as enthusiasm, and he shared that with those sitting around us. What a feast it is!

The wisdom of these children amazes me. I was blessed to have heard their words, to have been open to the Spirit moving through them. It makes me wonder. What other movements of the Spirit have I blocked or pushed away when a child or teenager came to me and I didn't pay attention? Does that happen to us collectively as an organization if we dismiss younger women or pay little attention to them when they speak to us? What do we lose if the circle is not expanded to include them? I pray that we be open and welcoming to girls and women of all ages. 🌸

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of *Women of the ELCA*.



AMEN!

Welcomed and Wise

by Catherine Malotky

I know I am not a solo practitioner, God. You have made me for community. I cannot discern who I am without interacting with a community. I cannot have a vocation without a community to bring it to life. I cannot grow or heal without a community.

I am fearfully and wonderfully made, it is true. But my vision is limited, as is my strength. I can only be good at so much. I have only so much energy. I need the insights of others to enrich me. I need to rely on others to extend my reach deeper and farther, beyond my capacity. Because we are all, *together*, called to make the world a place that more fully reflects your justice and mercy.

So, God. I am puzzled by the way being in community—whether it is my family, my workplace, my neighborhood, or my church—challenges me. We need each other so much, but it is hard to be different, to disagree, to mesh our hopes and goals.

While I rely on my communities to be sturdy for me, I can also be burdened by the weight of their expectations, strained by the stresses of trying to work together, and hurt by the misunderstandings and power struggles that seem part and parcel of community life.

How do we pull together rather than apart? How do we come to share a common goal, and then understand our roles and responsibilities? How can we be stewards of the health of our communities so that they might be places of inspiration and strength? And how do we welcome new participants, for their

sake at least as much as ours? How do we become the body of Christ?

Open my heart, God, to see your handiwork in me. Give me faith, that I might see in myself the one you love without condition, worthy of being your hands at work in the world, and made by your intention for a purpose that extends beyond the time and space inhabit.

God, I am your daughter, “my beloved,” adopted, eagerly welcomed for who I am and the gifts I bring.

Open my heart, God, to the wealth of your forgiving power in our lives. We will never enjoy the richness of these communities without it, because we will never be perfect at being together. We will hurt each other.

You have shown us, God, in Jesus how much you desire to be among us. You say we are worth this tenderness, the grace of releasing each other from sin’s grip so that we might celebrate again what we bring to each other and be inspired by what we can do together for the sake of justice and mercy.

Open my heart, God, to the power of your Spirit that ennobles us to serve in your name. In spite of detours into resentment or exhaustion, there is powerful ministry to be done. The world needs our compassion, our courage, our wisdom. Release us, filled with your Spirit, to serve. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been a editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

BLANKETS WARM HEARTS



Photo by Terri Lackey

Marge Sklarsky (left), All Saints Lutheran Church, Sun Valley, and Alexis Lammawin, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Thousand Oaks, cut and tie blankets.

Women and girls from southwest California congregations spent a Saturday in February at Emmanuel Lutheran Church, North Hollywood, making blankets for Project Linus. About 60 people from churches in the Southwest California Synod made more than 70 blankets for the project. The project was sponsored jointly by the synod's Women of the ELCA board and the Lutheran Youth Organization. Project Linus is non-profit organization based in Bloomington, Ill., whose purpose is to provide "love, a sense of security, warmth, and comfort to children who are seriously ill, traumatized, or otherwise in need."

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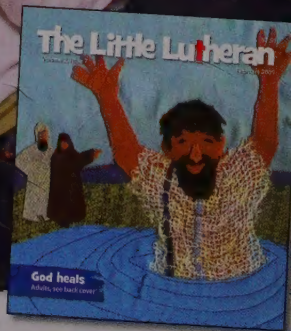
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